DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS

COMPLETE STATEMENT

OF

STEVEN L. STOCKTON, P.E.
DIRECTOR OF CIVIL WORKS
U. S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BEFORE

THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

COMPREHENSIVE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

June 24, 2008

Introduction

Madam Chair and members of the Subcommittee, I am Steven Stockton, Director of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on comprehensive watershed management and planning.

I will start my testimony with an overview of the current water resources issues for the Corps today, as I see them, followed by a perspective on the Corps role in integrated water resources management. We collaborate with other agencies and stakeholders and I will provide as examples five watershed studies now underway.

Water Resources Challenges

The water resources problems that the Nation faces are complex. Past, current, and emerging trends that impact water resources include the impacts of droughts, floods, and hurricanes; the migration of people to coastal states; growing urban centers in arid and semi-arid regions, with a need for reliable, sustainable water supply; urban development in river valleys and its impact on floodplains; aging infrastructure, sometimes breaking down or not performing as designed; the effects of climate change, which are difficult to pinpoint; sedimentation in multipurpose reservoirs used for flood or water storage; and water conflicts between states, which become most apparent when shared water resources diminish such as under long-term drought conditions. These and other similar challenges require coordinated and collaborative approaches.

Water resources planning and management requires an appreciation of the existing and potential future uses of the water resources. States and other resource agencies are growing in their engineering and water resources capabilities and many are showing much greater interest in being directly involved and even in leading water resources management opportunities. Where the Federal government has an interest in the water resources, water management is generally not the sole responsibility of either the States or the federal government but is rather a shared responsibility. Both the federal government and the States can benefit from this shared responsibility, and the Corps of Engineers is working to play a constructive role in these partnerships.

We are technical experts in water resources management, water policy, regulatory permits, and hazard response. Those roles are changing somewhat as the level of capability within more and more States and other organizations and their interest in assuming a larger role in water resource management increases. The Corps has, in its planning and engineering capability, the experience and knowledge to develop enduring water resources solutions, utilizing adaptive management, collaborative processes, and systems planning. These skills position the Corps as a partner in identifying problems, needs, opportunities, and potential shared solutions that are implementable within a watershed.

Corps Role in Watersheds

Historically, the Corps flood damage reduction and emergency response efforts have been watershed based. Since the great Mississippi River flood in 1927, the Corps has been building and maintaining a large system of levees and related features to reduce flood damage in the alluvial valley of the lower Mississippi River. This and our later effort to reduce flood damage along the Missouri River by building six large main stem dams were based in watershed planning.

For a number of reasons, the civil works construction program has become more focused on specific locally-based projects in recent years. The era of large multipurpose dams has come to a close in this country. The cost-sharing requirements of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 may also have contributed to this trend. Our sponsors have limited budgets and are often interested in minimizing their costs to achieve a solution to a specific water resources problem. Watershed studies are more challenging to arrange because they involve multiple sponsors, and require compatible interests and aligned budgets.

Nevertheless, we have undertaken a number of watershed studies since WRDA 1986. For example, the recent Illinois River Basin Restoration study covered 30,000 square miles in Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. The large geographic scale, numerous stakeholders, close teamwork, excellent communications, innovation, and commitment to collaboration earned its selection as the winner of the 2007 Environmental Planning Excellence Award of the American Planning Association. Our efforts to manage water on a large geographic scale have also led to three major Corps aquatic ecosystem restoration programs – in the Everglades, in the coastal wetlands ecosystem of Louisiana, and in and along the Upper Mississippi River and the Illinois Waterway.

Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of small-scale decision making over the last two decades has become more apparent in recent times. There is now a general recognition of the need for more holistic, comprehensive analysis by water resources practitioners at all levels of government.

The Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 2006 (PL 109-103) included $4.5 million for comprehensive analyses to examine multi-jurisdictional use and management of water resources on a watershed or regional scale, at full federal expense. The Corps used these funds for five studies from across the Nation. These two-year studies, which are nearing completion later this year, have helped bring stakeholder groups together, in many cases for the first time, to discuss water resource problems. The studies selected were:

1. Great Lakes Habitat Initiative;
2. Multi-jurisdictional Use and Management of Water Resources for the Delaware River Basin, NY, PA, NJ and DE;
3. Western States Watershed Study - Comprehensive Water Resource Planning for the 17 Western States;
4. Middle Mississippi River Regional Corridor; and
5. Virgin River Watershed Analysis Utah, Arizona and Nevada.

Each study is unique. They are resulting in important products, including tools to facilitate stakeholder involvement; database creation and development; development of regional strategies for restoration of water resources within a river corridor; the creation of plans to manage water resources around key issues such as flood plain management, water supply, and endangered species; and implementation of advance flood warning systems, as well as evacuation and flood risk communication plans. As these studies come to completion, I fully expect for us to see lessons learned and I look forward to sharing those with you at a later date.

A main observation is that collaboration is working! Partnerships with states and other resource agencies have helped to achieve better coordination. The Corps involvement provided tools and databases, collection and sharing of data, and engineering, scientific and environmental expertise to assist watershed planning."

Another observation is that the Federal government can be a successful team member in watershed efforts. The interactions with state and local officials, non-governmental organizations, and private interests can encourage a common language, making it easier to connect programs and projects within the watershed. Large-scale studies require the active involvement of a broad range of partners over time, including other participating Federal agencies. Each Federal agency brings a different programmatic emphasis. Such collaboration can improve the prospects for success at state, regional and local levels.

Assisting States in Watershed Efforts

Our Planning Assistance to States program, authorized in section 22 of WRDA 1974, provides planning and technical assistance for a wide variety of activities, including locally-led water resources plans. Similarly, under the Floodplain Management Service Program, authorized in section 206 of WRDA 1960, the Corps supports local efforts to reduce the risk of flood damage by planning in a watershed context.

Section 729 of WRDA 1986 authorized the Corps to assess water resource needs of river basins and watersheds. Section 2010 of WRDA 2007 increased the Federal share for this program to 75 percent and reduced the non-Federal share to 25 percent. We also have numerous technical assistance authorities for specific watersheds. For example, section 5119 of WRDA 2007 authorized assistance to help Oklahoma update its state water plan.

In addition, the Corps regulatory program is taking steps to make decisions in a broader context using GIS-based information, and our flood damage reduction program is working with FEMA to update floodplain maps that can be shared with states.

Looking to the Future

You may ask what else the Corps needs or can do to contribute to watershed analyses.

As previously noted, the Corps has the authorities that we need to allow us to provide planning and technical assistance to support locally-led water resources and floodplain management

planning efforts. The Corps has significant technical expertise to offer. For example, we can assist States to build technically sound watershed-based planning and management programs, which more holistically and sustainably help them to achieve their objectives. We are assessing what the States are doing to promote integrated water resources planning. The assessment will clarify the water resources capabilities of States. From this assessment and through a series of regional conferences, we may be able better to establish priorities for our planning assistance and floodplain management services programs.

The Corps role in the water resources community is evolving. In some cases, we are the lead. In others, we are a contributor or a facilitator. This is partly due to a change in the role of the States and local agencies. They are initiating more water resource planning efforts and projects on their own, and are approaching the Corps to assist on a technical level. Such partnerships can lead to more effective management of state and local water resources. However, their maturity and sophistication can vary significantly in their management and technical capability.

The evolution toward greater interest in collaboration is driven in part by the competition among uses in some watersheds, the evidence of cumulative impacts of multiple projects within others, the increased voice of stakeholder groups, and the growing interest in nonstructural and other management-based solutions.

Through such partnerships, we are providing expertise to help improve the effectiveness of watershed efforts. The Corps has and continues to reach out to other Federal agencies and non-government organizations, participate in development of shared visions on water resource needs and challenges, and support other agencies and stakeholders, with the objective of managing the Nation's water resources in a more sustainable way.

Summary

The interest in integrated water resources analysis, management and planning for current and future water needs and discussions about the appropriate role of the Corps have increased with the growing pressures on the Nation's water resources. As Brigadier General Joseph Schroedel of the South Atlantic Division stated in his testimony to this Subcommittee in March 2008, regarding the drought issues in the Southeast: ***"If any of the agencies - whether federal or state, industry or the public - are to successfully manage water, we must find a way to work more closely and cooperatively across boundaries, missions and jurisdictions."*** His testimony then and mine today, emphasize the interest at all levels of government in a more integrated approach to develop and sustain water resources for the good of the public, for continued economic development, and for security of the nation. Watershed-based analysis is an important element of modern water resources planning and can lead to sound, lasting solutions.

The Corps stands ready to work as a partner with State and local leaders by providing technical expertise, science and data to advance locally-led planning and other watershed efforts. Madam Chair, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you. This concludes my testimony. I would be glad to answer any questions you might have.